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Discourses of scale in network hospitality: From the Airbnb home to the global imaginary of 'belong anywhere'

ABSTRACT

Tourists are increasingly turning to peer-to-peer platforms such as Airbnb to arrange homestays in their destinations. For better or for worse, these forms of network hospitality are transforming the hospitality landscape, with critical repercussions for home owners, residential neighbourhoods, local economies, urban planners and company investors and executives. These stakeholders often frame their discussion of the benefits and drawbacks of network hospitality in scalar terms. The article begins by analysing the discursive construction of spatial scales, spanning from the private enclaves of hosts' homes, to the public spaces of neighbourhoods and cities, to the global imaginary implied in Airbnb's motto 'Belong Anywhere'. It then asks how temporal and digital scales are also invoked in discourse about Airbnb, and with what ethical and political implications. Drawing on scholarly research, newspaper articles and corporate marketing materials, the analysis reflects critically on how scale is deployed to assert power, assign moral responsibility, and make claims to belonging in the context of network hospitality.

KEYWORDS

Airbnb
collaborative economy
digital platforms
ethics
network hospitality
politics of scale

INTRODUCTION

In 2014, the online hospitality platform Airbnb launched a new branding campaign that featured a heart-shaped logo called the Beló and a new motto, 'Belong Anywhere'. The campaign rolled out with billboards, print advertisements and television commercials, including one called 'Never a Stranger'. In this 30-second spot, a young woman in a red scarf strolls along a city street, walks on the beach, visits a local cafe, and heads into a karaoke bar with new friends. Over these images, a woman's voice reads a thank you note:

> Dear stranger,
> When I booked this trip my friends thought I was crazy. Why would I stay in someone else's house? But this morning a city I've never been to felt like one I already knew. I just wanted to thank you for sharing your world with me. It felt like home.
> Airbnb. Belong Anywhere.
>
> (Airbnb 2015a)

A series of place names then flash across the screen – Tokyo, Tulum, Paris, Rio – before landing on a final thought: 'With over a million homes around the world, you're never a stranger'.

In 2017, Arran Països Catalans, a youth organization associated with the Catalan pro-independence movement, released a video that also showed tourists strolling down a city street in Barcelona's old town, taking in beach views and visiting local restaurants. We see large groups of tourists pouring out of cruise ships, crowding sidewalks, snapping photos and blocking the streets with their rolling suitcases. The cafes captured in these scenes are remarkable not for their local feel, but for their homogenized 'deal of the day' beer-and-paella menus. The camera cuts away from this crush of tourists to show anti-tourism Arran activists spray painting a tourist coach with the slogan: 'El turisme mata els barris' ('Tourism Kills Neighbourhoods') (Arran 2017).

Airbnb is now the largest online hospitality network in the world. Barcelona is now teetering on the brink of overtourism, thanks in part to Airbnb's great success in the city. I use these two videos to introduce this article because they show two sides of the same coin: one promotes tourism, the other protests it, but they both capture the complexities of being with strangers in the context of hospitality and tourism.

Taken together, these videos set the scene for the themes I explore in this article. Both videos raise ethical and political questions about the ethics and externalities of 'belonging anywhere', and especially about the role of the so-called 'sharing economy' in bringing strangers together online and in one another's homes, neighbourhoods, and cities. Both videos also hint at a discourse of scale. The Airbnb video conjures a range of scalar imaginaries: the intimate space of a host's house, the neighbourhood where you get to live like a local, and a world that feels like home. In the video from Barcelona, we see a similar montage of tourist sights and city streets and local cafes, only here the neighbourhood is not a scale of belonging but of vulnerability; it is tourism's murder victim.

Hospitality often spans and stitches together various scales, from hosting in the private space of one's home, to the public branding of cities as hospitable or as sanctuaries, to national policies on immigration and asylum, to global imaginaries of cosmopolitan hospitality. And at each of these scales, different – often

competing – stories are revealed. My focus in this article is on discourses of scale in the context of network hospitality, and specifically Airbnb, but my approach can be applied to the complexities of ethics and power that shape hospitality in a broader sense. In the discussion that follows, I explore how vocabularies and metaphors of scale are deployed to support certain, often competing, claims to belonging, to citizenship and to power.

The article begins by establishing the theoretical groundwork and defining key concepts, namely network hospitality, the sharing economy and collaborative consumption, and geographies of scale. After outlining some methodological considerations, it then examines the way scale has been invoked in corporate marketing discourse, public critique and protests, and scholarly research on Airbnb. This analysis starts by exploring a range of spatial scales before turning to consider temporal and digital scales, drawing attention along the way to the kinds of subjectivities and claims to belonging and power that are attached to these various scales.

THEORETICAL CONTEXT

Network hospitality

Airbnb is perhaps the best-known example of the phenomenon I call 'network hospitality' (Germann Molz 2011, 2014a), but the term casts a wide net to include the host of related home swapping, ride sharing, travel guiding or meal sharing sites that now populate the tourism landscape. In other words, these are the websites that facilitate flexible peer-to-peer (rather than corporation-to-customer) exchanges of the material resources of hospitality (food, drink, beds or rides) and the sociable resources of local information, welcome and mobile conviviality in a new place (Germann Molz 2012).

Network hospitality refers both to this technical assemblage and to the emerging social logic that accompanies these technical connections. As everyday social life becomes more mobile and more networked, we are more likely to interact with friends and strangers through a paradigm of hospitality, performing as hosts or as guests and encountering each other in various hospitality venues. In this sense, my concept of network hospitality is informed by the work of several scholars who have situated hospitality at the heart of a social world where our lives are more and more likely to be made up of 'strange encounters' (Ahmed 2000). I see hospitality, in general, and network hospitality, specifically, as embedded in the political and moral fabric of social life. It is 'both a condition and an effect of social relations, spatial configurations, and power structures' (Lynch et al. 2011: 14).

This view of network hospitality is inspired by the work of David Bell who argues that 'hospitality *is* society'; it is the 'flickering moments of "host-guesting" [that] contribute to the ongoing work of living together, to building and maintaining society' (2012: 138). It is also inspired by Soile Veijola and Eeva Jokinen's (2008: 176) concept of the 'hostessing society'. As they observe, 'The whole world is not only travelling, as John Urry (2000, 2002) and other theorists of global mobilities state, but *the whole world* is also *hosting*' (original emphasis). The recent growth of hospitality platforms like Airbnb has made this claim – and its political and ethical implications – even more vital.

Network hospitality is characterized by certain features. It revolves around a social logic that entails brief but intense moments of togetherness and it relies on the integration of technology into everyday and intimate encounters. It creates scenarios in which performances of hosting and

guesting are fluid and interchangeable, resulting in the phenomenon of 'guests without hosts'. Finally, it opens up new spatial arrangements of hosting and guesting (Germann Molz 2014a). On this latter point, network hospitality transforms the trajectories and flows of tourism mobilities in destinations, for example by pulling private homes, residential neighbourhoods, or rarely visited places into the tourist circuit and dispersing tourists beyond the city centre (Zuev 2011; Gurran and Phibbs 2017). This means that various scales of hospitality – such as the home, neighbourhood, or city – intertwine in complex ways that require tourists, residents and other inhabitants to share these spaces and their resources in new ways.

The sharing economy and collaborative consumption

Network hospitality is deeply intertwined with the sharing economy and practices of collaborative consumption, or what some tourism scholars refer to as the collaborative economy (Dredge and Gyimóthy 2017). In 2010, brand consultant Rachel Botsman introduced the idea of the 'new sharing economy' in a book titled *What's Mine is Yours* (Botsmon and Rogers) and in a popular TED talk on collaborative consumption. Perhaps not surprisingly, she used Airbnb as a case in point. After all, Airbnb ticked all of the sharing economy boxes – people with excess resources like empty spare bedrooms could earn a bit of money by offering strangers short-term access to those underutilized resources. As Botsman described it, in the wake of the 2007 economic crisis this kind of collaborative consumption was a win-win arrangement for homeowners struggling to make their mortgage payments and for cash-strapped millennials eager to have experiences without actually owning things.

At first blush, these new sharing platforms did appear to usher in more democratic, responsible and sustainable alternatives to traditional industries. In the tourism and hospitality sector, in particular, the sharing economy seemed to combat the materialistic hedonism of mass tourism, offer more authentic experiences, and disperse the economic benefits of tourism beyond the city center (see Dredge and Gyimóthy 2017). Since then, however, critics have questioned both the promise and the terminology of the sharing economy. It is not sharing when you pay for the privilege of sleeping in someone's guest bedroom or riding in the backseat of their car, as Russell Belk points out. He calls it pseudo-sharing: 'commodity exchange wrapped in a vocabulary of sharing' (2014: 7). Furthermore, critics questioned the capitalist investment structure of so-called 'sharing economy' start-ups like Airbnb and Uber. Neal Gorenflo, a contributor to the blog Shareable, writes that the early optimism about the sharing economy quickly shifted once outside investors got involved:

> As the money rolled in, the communitarian element rolled out. Exploiting peer providers, purposely breaking regulations, strong-arming local governments, and unethical competitive tactics became the norm. The very thing that earned these start-ups traction in the first place – how they recast relationships between strangers in radically constructive terms – was sacrificed to growth.
>
> (2017)

In light of such revelations, critics began to argue that instead of the virtuous-sounding 'sharing economy', we should really be using terms like 'platform', 'gig' or 'on-demand' economy so as not to lose sight of the precarious,

unprotected contract-work on which it relies (Cockayne 2016; Dredge and Gyimóthy 2017; Ravenelle 2017; Srnicek 2016).

I think it is worth holding on to the term 'sharing'. I am very wary of the potential for 'share-washing' that comes along with such a pleasant term as sharing. But when we are talking about sharing limited resources – including private resources like homes and bedrooms, as well as public resources like neighbourhoods, city streets, and the urban commons – among a diverse population, we are not just being pleasant: we are talking about moral responsibility, belonging, access and power. Who shares what with whom, when, where and for how long? These are questions with political and ethical implications.

Among those who question whether Airbnb is a more responsible form of tourist accommodation is Dianne Dredge, whose work with Szilvia Gyimóthy (2015, 2017) takes a critical approach to the collaborative economy in tourism. In a chapter on responsibility and care, Dredge (2017) calls for a deeper exploration of ethics in the collaborative economy, including Airbnb. She points to four characteristics that make it difficult – but crucial – to think about moral responsibility in this context:

- The impacts of the collaborative economy are immediate and urgent – at least they are framed that way – but our responses need to be deliberate and proactive, not reactive.
- Moral responsibility is relational, distributed and multi-lateral. It comprises a range of actors, it relies not only on private assets and on public resources, and it impacts people and public interests beyond the direct transaction between hosts and guests.
- Regulating the collaborative economy requires public-private action and an understanding that the negative externalities are a shared responsibility.
- The liquid organization of the collaborative economy means that 'responsibilities can be shifted elsewhere or even avoided' (Dredge 2017: 43–44).

Furthermore, Dredge notes, the real difficulty of thinking about moral responsibility in the collaborative economy lies in the fact that 'relationships between actors spread out in all directions so that good actions towards one set of stakeholders might not [benefit] another set of stakeholders' (2017: 44).

Without explicitly stating it, Dredge seems to be calling for a scalar analysis of the ethical implications of the collaborative economy. Her references to multi-lateral relations, public-private resources, immediacy and urgency, shifting responsibilities and distributed impacts 'spreading out in all directions' suggest that Airbnb's ethical implications span several spatial, temporal and digital scales.

Geographies of scale

The way we talk and write and worry about Airbnb often draws on a scalar vocabulary, so I turn now to another body of scholarship: geographies of scale. About twenty years ago, there was something of an ontological shift in the way geographers were talking and writing about scale. Rather than conceiving of geographical scales as naturally given, nested containers for social activity – imagine something like the city inside the state inside the nation inside the globe – geographers began to champion concepts of scale as a social construct, as an effect of social relations rather than as a container for them, and as an instrument of political empowerment. As Delaney and Leitner (1997: 94–95)

explained at the time, scale 'is not simply an external fact awaiting discovery but a way of framing conceptions of reality'. A key contribution to this literature was Neil Smith's work in the early 1990s on the 'politics of scale', in which he argued that 'there is nothing ontologically given about the traditional division between home and locality, urban and regional, national and global scales' (1992: 73). On the contrary, differences in scale are produced and legitimized as social actors bring certain conceptions and ideologies of scale to 'their efforts to change the world and, of course, to resist undesirable change' (Smith 1992: 142).

About ten years ago, geographers were at it again, this time proposing that we should get rid of the concept of scale. In 2005, Sallie Marston, John Jones and Keith Woodward, published a provocative paper titled 'Human geography without scale', which called for dropping the concept from human geography altogether. Among other things, they argued that no matter how you cut it, scalar thinking reproduces a vertical ontology that delimits political agency. By that time, the new mobilities paradigm had arrived bringing with it a whole new basket of spatial metaphors that allowed us to think about social relations not in terms of vertically nested scales, but in terms of horizontal networks, assemblages, scapes, flows and liquids (Sheller and Urry 2006). In fact, these are metaphors I usually use in my work on hospitality and tourism. For the moment, however, I am going to return to the concept of scale.

Despite its conceptual faults, I am not convinced that the notion of scale has become irrelevant. Political claims still get established and endorsed through appeals to scale; stakeholders still fight over which scales matter; and social actors still look to scale to indicate, as geographer Eugene McCann (2003: 160) puts it, 'who belongs to a place and who is a valid representative of its interests'. I sympathize with Marston and her co-authors' wariness about reifying scale as a political category, but what do we do with a concept that has such persistent discursive purchase?

My aim is not to reproduce scale as an ontological category, but rather to adopt what Marston, et al. call 'another version of the "politics of scale"', namely 'the need to expose and denaturalize scale's discursive power' (2005: 420). Scale is invoked to support certain – often competing – claims about belonging, moral responsibility and power. And these framings are often fraught with contradictions, depending on whose interests are at stake. As anthropologist Anna Tsing argues, 'scale is not just a neutral frame for viewing the world; scale must be brought into being: proposed, practiced, and evaded, as well as taken for granted. Scales are claimed and contested in cultural and political projects' (2005: 58). In other words, scale is a power play. If nothing else, scale has a way of bringing some stories to life while silencing others. I use scale, then, as a kind of heuristic device to reveal the kinds of stories scale can tell about political and ethical relations in network hospitality.

METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

I first became sensitized to the concept of scale in a series of conference presentations I attended in 2017. Scale was a kind of 'absent presence' in these presentations. It was present, at least to my mind, in the discrete units of analysis scholars had chosen – for example, the Airbnb home or Airbnb's impact on the city – but it was absent as an explicit analytical framework. After I left the conference I conducted a review of the recent social science literature on Airbnb and here, too, I found that researchers tended to focus on one particular scale, such as the body, the home, the neighbourhood, or the city, but rarely

analysed network hospitality across these overlapping scales (cf. Roelofsen and Minca 2018). I also began gathering recent journalistic coverage of Airbnb from mainstream newspapers and magazines (see Cheng 2016 for a systematic review). A survey of the headlines revealed that these reports, too, focused on discrete scales, the most newsworthy of which seemed to be neighbourhoods and cities taking the brunt of Airbnb's impact. The few journalists who focused on the scale of the home framed it either as an income-generating investment for hosts or as an asset vulnerable to scams. Finally, I collected material from the Airbnb website and blog, including marketing documents and videos, especially those related to the 'Belong Anywhere' campaign, company reports on Airbnb's impact on local communities, and Community Compact and Community Commitment statements that the company issued in the wake of accusations of tax avoidance and discrimination.

As I began to examine this data, I noticed that, depending on whether they were focusing on the intimate scale of the home, the local scale of the neighbourhood, the public scale of the city or the global scale of 'belonging anywhere', these materials tended to tell somewhat different – but related – stories about Airbnb. My intention is to offer some exploratory reflections on a sampling of these materials. Admittedly, some of the questions I raise in this analysis are quite speculative, but I pose them in the hopes of prompting further systematic research on discourses of scale in network hospitality. In this sense, the examples of scale I focus on here are meant to be illustrative, not comprehensive or definitive.

My reflections are informed by the analytical framework of critical discourse analysis, a methodology that pays particular attention to the intersections of language, social meaning, and relations of power (Dijk 1993; Fairclough 2013). Critical discourse analysis sees language as 'crucial to the ways that power is reproduced, legitimated, and exercised within social relations and institutions' (Tonkiss 2017: 480). In this case, my analysis was concerned with understanding how vocabularies of scale are used to assert power, assign moral responsibility, or navigate belonging and exclusion in the context of Airbnb. By examining scale within this critical framework, I assume that the meanings ascribed to scale are not natural or inevitable, but rather are negotiated through social discourses and representational strategies that empower some people and advance some interests while silencing others.

SPATIAL SCALES

According to its own statistics, Airbnb now operates in 191 countries and 65,000 cities. Airbnb hosts offer more than three million listings worldwide (1400 of which are castles, apparently) and have accommodated over 200 million guests (Airbnb 2017a). Predictions are that by 2020 Airbnb hosts will be taking 500 million bookings, rising to one billion bookings a night by 2025 (Doward 2016). One billion guests in three million homes in 65,000 cities in 191 countries. Online and worldwide. 'Belong Anywhere'. Airbnb seems to glide seamlessly across these various scales. We will start our journey at the scale of the home.

The home

Much of the sociological research on host-guest encounters in Airbnb takes as its point of departure the domestic space of the home. The home is where we find the wonderful joys and awkward discomforts of human-to-human encounters between strangers. This is where disruption really happens: having

strangers in your bathroom, your kitchen, your daily rhythm. Using your towels; asking you for restaurant recommendations; figuring out the keys; keeping you up late talking about life; leaving you little thank you notes or a pencil drawing of your cat (Monroe 2014).

Network hospitality produces these ethical relations between hosts and guests, and between hosts and their homes, in particular ways, as ethnographic research on Airbnb reveals (Knauss 2017; Christensen 2017; Strabrowski 2017a). These studies highlight how the home becomes a factory for new kinds of tourism experiences. Host-guest interactions thus revolve around an entrepreneurial logic that positions the dwelling space as an investment and the host as a service provider performing manual and emotional labor to produce the hospitality experience for the guest (Hochschild 2003; Lemonis 2015; O'Regan and Choe 2017).

Airbnb's marketing discourse also frames the host as a 'micro-entrepreneur' and the home as a return-on-investment commodity. A series of print ads for Airbnb show hosts out enjoying life with captions like: 'My spare room funds my travel bug' or 'My house funds my kiteboarding'. A 2015 report published by Airbnb titled *Airbnb: A New Resource for Middle Class Families* states that amidst economic uncertainty:

> We are proud that Airbnb has become an economic lifeline for the middle class. Home sharing and Airbnb allow local residents to use what is typically one of their greatest expenses – their home – to make additional income that helps them pay the bills.
>
> (Airbnb 2015b)

And in another report titled *Airbnb's Positive Economic Impact in Cities around the World* (Airbnb n.d.), the company focuses on homes and households. The report delivers statistics indicating that '81% of hosts share the home in which they live'; '53% say that hosting helped them stay in their home'; and '48% of host income is used to pay for regular household expenses'.

In an era of neo-liberal austerity, precarious work and diminishing social safety nets, homeowners are empowered to take an individual and entrepreneurial – rather than collective and structural – stance to combat the ravages of the global economic crisis. The solution to their financial difficulties is not an overhaul of harmful neo-liberal economic policies, but rather a bit of entrepreneurial zeal at home.

Scholars have long debated the ethics of commercial hospitality (Aramberri 2001), including in the commercial home (Lynch et al. 2009), but in the context of network hospitality, framing the home as an investment shapes the ethical relations between hosts and guests in particular ways. What do they owe each other? In a telling remark, Airbnb's co-founder Brian Chesky claimed that payment 'puts both parties on their best behaviour and makes the whole process more reliable' (cited in Botsman and Rogers 2010: xiii). Chesky is referring to the way money holds both hosts and guests accountable, but he is also referring to the reputation economy. In order for strangers to stay with and welcome one another in their homes, they have to establish a certain level of trust. Network hospitality has a technical fix for that: reputation systems.

After a hospitality encounter, hosts and guests go onto the platform to rate and leave references for one another. Were you a responsive host? Were you a courteous guest? The system encourages hosts and guests to monitor one another in order to safeguard the community from bad actors. But since

the encounter is transactional – the accommodation is actually a product for sale – the reputation system is also a marketing system. Hosts who want to make any money through Airbnb have to have a stellar reputation. In fact, Airbnb has a name for this: the 'superhost', a status to which hosts can aspire (see Roelofsen and Minca 2018). This conflation of the home-as-commodity with the online reputation system requires hosts and guests to relate to one another in the home through a mode of social surveillance (Germann Molz 2014b), which relates to the digital scales I discuss below. In this case, the moral responsibility of hospitality is not necessarily about caring for one another's physical and emotional needs, but about safeguarding reputations and securitizing the hospitality network.

Leveled at the intimate scale of the home, scholarly research uncovers the everyday intricacies of host-guest encounters within shared domestic spaces. It reveals how the home shifts from a private dwelling into an income-generating investment and a commodity, which aligns with Airbnb's marketing claims that the economic benefits of Airbnb accrue at the level of the home and the household. It also illustrates how the reputation system accompanying this commodification of the home shapes host-guest encounters through a logic of social surveillance and interpersonal monitoring.

The neighbourhood

With the notable exception of Soile Veijola and Petra Falin's (2016) article on 'Mobile neighbouring', scholars have not often associated hospitality with neighbourhoods. With the emergence of network hospitality, however, the neighbourhood commonly appears as a scale of analysis in the scholarly literature. In many of these studies, researchers tackle Airbnb's impact on local rents and housing markets through the prism of the neighbourhood (e.g. Levendis and Dicle's 2016 study of New Orleans neighbourhoods and Horn and Merante's 2017 study of Boston neighbourhoods), often operationalized by zip code (Barron et al. 2017) or coded as a critique of neighbourhood gentrification (Gant 2016; Lee 2016; Marjoribanks 2017; Mermet 2017). In spite of Airbnb's own claim in its *Positive Economic Impact* report that it 'makes neighbourhoods better places to live, work and visit', most of these studies find that Airbnb at the very least exacerbates rising costs and housing uncertainty, even if it cannot be pinpointed as the cause.

These economic and ethical concerns are made all the more complex by the fact that Airbnb marketing discourse frames residential neighbourhoods as consumable destinations for tourists to explore and experience, thereby transforming communal space into commodified space (Stabrowski 2017b). In particular, the neighbourhood is pitched as the space where tourists can live like a local. In the *Positive Economic Impact* report, Airbnb included a few more data bites, this time about neighbourhoods rather than homes:

> To date, tens of millions of travelers have chosen Airbnb to experience cities not as tourists, but as locals. 79% of travelers want to explore a specific neighbourhood; 91% of travelers want to 'live like a local'; and 74% of Airbnb are properties outside the main hotel districts.

Airbnb's survey data point to something that scholars have long noted about network hospitality: it expands the geographies of tourism and hospitality within destinations by pulling residential, suburban and even exurban

neighbourhoods into tourist circuits. Network hospitality transfers tourism from city centers or museum quarters into unexpected corners where little more than everyday life is going on, which is exactly what Airbnb tourists want to see. Empirical research corroborates this argument. In Amsterdam, Airbnb guests were found to venture further afield than hotel guests and were more likely to explore 'neighbourhoods with a more residential character' (Heide 2015: 76). In Barcelona, in 2009, 80 per cent of Airbnb bookings were in the Old Town; seven years later, 70 per cent of bookings are *outside* the Old Town and outside traditional hotel districts (Doward 2016). And a recent study in Sydney reveals that 'Airbnb listings now extend well beyond the traditional tourist destinations of Sydney's inner and beachside areas' (Gurran and Phibbs 2017: 80). With Airbnb's 'neighbourhoods' product offerings, the neighbourhood – and the local lives that take place there – becomes a tourist destination in its own right.

This wider distribution of tourism mobilities into residential neighbourhoods is not always experienced as a positive impact. For example, as my opening example illustrated, protestors in Barcelona claim that tourism 'kills *neighbourhoods*', and they spray painted this accusation on buildings and tour buses. Protestors took to the streets with banners indicting tourism for ruining their neighbourhoods. Academic studies of Airbnb's impact on neighbourhoods turn up a familiar list of complaints from local residents: noise, nuisance, traffic, parking and waste management issues. But as Gurran and Phibbs's (2017: 87) analysis of network hospitality in Sydney revealed, neighbours also expressed 'a more general disquiet about the increasing presence of visitors in the neighbourhood', which one local council member described as 'the feeling of unease that the changing tide of faces brings on'.

These competing scholarly and marketing discourses simultaneously frame the neighbourhood as a desirable and authentic destination where tourists can engage with local life, as a site of engagement with local people, as a competitive market and as a victim of Airbnb's negative impacts: rising rents, diminishing housing supply, gentrification and the influx of unwelcome tourists who disrupt the calm veneer of everyday life. To some extent, the neighbourhood is also counter framed as the scale at which resistance against these impacts can be mounted, but it is more so the city scale that is invoked in discourses about governance, regulation and political agency. For example, in their critique of the 'sharing economy', Koen Frenken and Juliet Schor (2017: 6) refer to neighbours and neighbourhoods as vulnerable to the externalities of sharing but also as sites of resistance. Ultimately, though, they conclude that effective resistance has to happen at the level of the city, with 'municipalities […] tightening their regulations towards home sharing platforms' (Frenken and Schor 2017).

The city

In discourses of network hospitality, the city tends to be framed not only as a destination – one that can become a victim of its own success due to overtourism – but also as a jurisdiction, as a regulatory partner, or as a playground for experimenting with sharing. Many scholars and journalists refer to the city as the proper scale at which to 'handle' and 'respond' to Airbnb (Frenken and Schor 2017; Gurran and Phibbs 2017; Becker 2017). In other words, the question of moral responsibility lands at the doorstep of city government where the possible responses are limited to the legislative and regulatory tools at the government's disposal.

As Dianne Dredge (2017) points out, however, there are many structural obstacles to legislating and regulating Airbnb. For one thing, the expansion of Airbnb in many cities has happened so quickly that local governments are left applying stop-gap measures without the time for careful deliberation. Sydney, London, New York and Amsterdam, for example, have all tried to limit Airbnb's impact on the availability of affordable housing by enforcing laws that limit the number of days a home can be rented out, requiring Airbnb hosts to register with the city, or requiring homeowners be resident in their homes a minimum number of days per year (Woolf 2016). In addition to implementing these kinds of market regulations, urban policy-makers are also 'scrambling' (Gurran and Phibbs 2017) and 'grappling' (Dredge and Gyimóthy 2017) at an 'amazing pace' (Grisdale 2018) – these are the words scholars use – to manage unexpected and unpredictable pressures on traffic, parking, emergency services and disability access. But without clear tax codes and enforcement in place, these externalities are absorbed at the scale of the city, while the profits are privatized.

If Airbnb poses a problem for the city, it also holds great promise. Some cities have elected to embrace Airbnb and work with the company as a regulatory partner. Amsterdam is a model in this regard, taking early action to work closely with Airbnb to ensure adherence to local laws and tax codes. The city even published a *Sharing Economy Action Plan*, which takes the position that the city's role is not to 'ban or authorize' companies like Airbnb, but rather to 'monitor and seize opportunities where possible' (ShareNL 2016), such as the promise of the sharing economy to promote sustainability, social cohesion and quality of life. In this document, the city is framed as a 'playground' for piloting new sharing projects. Several other cities have taken Amsterdam's lead and partnered with Airbnb, though this often means taking a light regulatory touch or allowing Airbnb to collect lodging taxes on the city's behalf with little government oversight.

In a study of the peer-to-peer economy and urban development policy in Toronto, Sean Grisdale (2017) found that, given the city's desire to attract technology entrepreneurs, not to mention the buzzy appeal of the 'sharing economy', many city officials felt they had no choice but to embrace these disruptive platform economies. He characterized Toronto's mayor's reaction as one of resignation. His attitude seemed to be that these disruptive economies are coming anyway, and if we do not welcome them some other city will. Amsterdam's action plan expresses a similar sentiment of inevitability: 'The platforms are here to stay, and the sharing economy is an irreversible trend' (ShareNL 2016: 6).

Dredge and Gyimóthy (2015) argue that this kind of attitude – what Grisdale refers to as 'roll-with-it-neoliberalization' (2018: 29) – has a silencing effect. The implicit assumption that the sharing economy is inevitable 'silences more nuanced understandings of the need for and challenges of regulation' (Dredge and Gyimóthy (2015: 297). Furthermore, they warn that yielding to the discourse of inevitability of the 'sharing economy' limits our political response to just two options: support it or facilitate it. Dredge and Gyimóthy worry that this rhetoric of inevitability compromises governments' abilities to protect social welfare and shape just, healthy and sustainable societies (2015: 298). Many cities end up implementing stop-gap regulations – like limiting the number of days a unit can be rented, for example – rather than imagining the kind of urban futures they want and thinking about how, or whether, Airbnb contributes to that vision.

The nation

The data and scholarship on Airbnb are relatively silent on the scale of the nation. However, there are a few examples that raise important political and ethical questions at this scale. The first is Sweden. In 2017, VisitSweden, the country's official travel and tourism website, posted a listing on Airbnb. The listing was: Sweden. The entire country. To advertise the new listing, they launched a video narrated by a Swedish man named Åke. As the camera sweeps across views of Sweden's stunning natural landscape, Åke makes his pitch:

> *Hi, my name is Åke and this is my home.*
>
> *Roughly 100 million acres of land that is all mine. Well, I share it with 10 million other people, but I'm speaking on their behalf, so to speak.*
>
> *Welcome to the relaxation area.* [We see a vast lake under a pink sky.] *It's very spacious to say the least. And check this out. One hundred thousand tempered infinity pools.*
>
> *This is my terrace.* [A rock outcropping perched over a blue sea.] *Custom-design with panoramic floor-to-ceiling views in every direction.* [A night sky illuminated by aurora borealis.] *And this is my bathroom, Swedish minimalistic style.* [A mossy green forest.] *Completely outfitted with all necessities.* […]
>
> *You see in Sweden, we have this thing called Freedom to Roam. It is a right protected by the law that allows me to sleep, and eat, and walk pretty much wherever I want. And now you can too. Because we listed the entire country on Airbnb.*
>
> *Welcome to my home. Welcome to Sweden.*
>
> (VisitSweden 2017)

The video cleverly plays with scale here, presenting the whole country is if touring a home. Of course, this is a marketing gimmick, but it highlights political and ethical questions about who has the right to what public resources. The listing is meant to draw attention to Sweden's Allemansrätten, or freedom to roam policy, which is common among Nordic countries. In the U.S. context, however, we see a distinct contrast from this conflation of the home and the nation and the invitation to roam freely.

In early 2017, Airbnb aired a commercial during the National Football League's Super Bowl, the most watched televised event in the United States. The advertisement, titled 'We Accept', showed a montage of faces of all different ages, genders, races and ethnicities overlayed with the message that no matter our differences, we all belong (Airbnb 2017b). Given the timing, just days after Donald Trump announced a ban on travelers from predominantly Muslim countries, the ad appeared to be confronting nationalistic anti-immigration rhetoric. But sceptics suggested that the ad had been commissioned originally not as a response to Trump's xenophobia, but to counter claims of discrimination within the Airbnb community.

Here, the scale of the nation is deployed in complex ways. On the one hand, it is invoked to align Airbnb's ethos of hospitality with ideals of multiculturalism and national hospitality towards immigrants. At the same time, however, the ad was possibly part of a different campaign, whose aim was to handle accusations of discrimination, and to do so with public relations rather than actual adherence to federal equal housing and interstate commerce

laws. The scale of the nation is simultaneously embraced and eluded in this episode.

Indeed, in the United States., federal anti-discrimination laws have been a sticking point for Airbnb. Central to the debate are questions of scale: whether Airbnb should be subject to regulation at the scale of the city, the state, or the federal government. Legal scholar Sara Light acknowledges that most stakeholders have tended to assume that even though Airbnb and Uber are global companies, their actual operations tend to be 'city-specific' and should therefore be subject to local regulations. However, she argues that federal law can and should play a strong regulatory role on certain issues, namely the enforcement of national anti-discrimination and consumer protection laws (Light 2018: 3). Later, I will come back to this issue of discrimination to show how Airbnb appeals to the digital scale to absolve itself of legal responsibilities in this regard. But first, I want to finish this discussion of spatial scales by thinking through the somewhat intangible scale at play in Airbnb's famous motto: 'Belong Anywhere'.

Anywhere

The motto and its logo – the Beló – were introduced in 2014 by Airbnb's CEO Brian Chesky, who wrote on the company's blog:

> For so long, people thought Airbnb was about renting houses. But really, *we're about home. You see, a house is just a space, but a home is where you belong. And what makes this global community so special is that for the very first time, you can belong anywhere.* […]
>
> *Cities used to be villages.* Everyone knew each other, and everyone knew they had a place to call home. But after the mechanization and Industrial Revolution of the last century, those feelings of trust and belonging were displaced by mass-produced and impersonal travel experiences. We also stopped trusting each other. And in doing so, we lost something essential about what it means to be a community. […]
>
> That's why *Airbnb is returning us to a place where everyone can feel they belong*.
>
> (Chesky 2014, emphasis added)

As Chesky's scalar metaphors suggest, 'Belong Anywhere' collapses spatial, scalar and social distinctions between city and villages; home and global. 'Belong Anywhere' means not visiting but *living* in a place – even if for a day. We saw this in the promotional video I described at the beginning of this article, where the traveller claims that a city she never knew suddenly felt like home.

But what kind of scale is 'anywhere', anyway? The images that accompany the motto range from the intimate spaces of people's kitchens, to famous cityscapes (like the Eiffel Tower in Paris), to an image of a key cut with a condensed skyline of the world's most iconic landmarks. Presumably, this is not just the key to the city, but to *any* city in the world. Another one of Airbnb's (2014) promotional videos shows an animated spaceship landing on a planet staked by a flag with the Beló logo on it, suggesting that anywhere extends even to outer space!

The scalar vagueness of 'anywhere' allows us – and Airbnb – to project a wide range of interpretations onto the motto, stitching the intimate scale of

the home to the scale of the city to the aspirational scale of the whole world or maybe even the universe. As if all of these scales are politically, ethically and culturally seamless. There is a kind of cosmopolitan aspiration emanating from the scale of 'anywhere', a scale that embraces faraway others and grants access to their everyday lives, but that also promises detachment.

TEMPORAL SCALES

Airbnb's 'Never a Stranger' video hints at a certain temporal scale as well. How long does it take to belong? To feel like a local? Only one day? This notion of accelerated belonging – of already having friends in a place and feeling at home there within one day – is part of the cosmopolitan fantasy Airbnb's Belong Anywhere motto sells. Elsewhere, however, other temporal scales are deployed to signal different claims to belonging in one's home, one's neighbourhood, or one's city.

In the Airbnb report I mentioned earlier, *Airbnb: A New Resource for Middle Class Families*, the opening image of a grey-haired couple is accompanied by the caption: 'Good Neighbours: On average, Airbnb hosts have lived in their hometowns for almost 20 years'. Here, Airbnb is implicitly refuting claims that many hosts are actually absentee property speculators. Explicitly, however, the spatial scales of neighbourhoods and hometowns are conflated with the temporal scale of longevity. In fact, Airbnb's promise of immediate belonging for guests relies on this appeal to the long-term residence of homeowners and hosts. By virtue of their long-standing engagement with a place, hosts become brokers for the authentic experiences and daily rhythms of local life that Airbnb peddles.

In his study of urban development in Austin, Texas in the 1990s, geographer Eugene McCann points out that 'discussions of "our neighbourhood" and "our city" are interwoven with appeals to time of residence in a neighbourhood and longstanding cultural connections to a city', which has important implications for policy and politics (McCann 2003: 160). Permanent residents are both the beneficiaries and the victims of Airbnb's success in a particular neighbourhood or city; the commodified experience promised through Airbnb exploits the authenticity won by long-term engagement for a sense of short-term belonging and enjoyment.

Similar intersections of spatial and temporal scales are deployed in protesters' discourses as well, with Airbnb framed as 'the cute new kid on the block' (Doward 2016) versus residents as long-term constituents. McCann encountered similar overlaps between temporal and spatial scales in his case study of Austin. He cites a local protestor who criticized an external planning organization for being out of touch with the 'heart and soul' of the city. 'What I'm talking about is the people who have grandmothers here, who have been members of the churches for many years' (McCann 2003: 172). McCann notes that in urban politics 'strategic framings of reality often define spatial and temporal scales in combination with and in reference to each other' (2003: 175). The discourse surrounding Airbnb deploys similar temporal scales alongside spatial framings. In Airbnb's marketing discourse, localness and longevity reinforce one another, as do globalness and ephemerality.

Temporal scales are also politicized as objects of municipal governance. As I noted earlier, critics calling for more regulation on Airbnb have focused primarily on limiting the number of days homes can be rented. New York and San Francisco both restrict the number of days an entire home can be rented

out per year, unless the resident also stays there, and Airbnb struck a deal last year with London and Amsterdam to police limits on the number of days per year a complete unit can be rented (Woolf 2016). At stake in these debates is the claim that Airbnb's high-turnover, short-term rentals are draining the supply of long-term rental housing in these cities.

Meanwhile, as I noted earlier, the fast pace of Airbnb's growth has left urban planners and city legislators scrambling to keep up with new regulations and policy solutions. In academia, too, 'the rapid and disruptive growth of sharing economy has left many [researchers] unprepared and insufficient time for the tourism academic discourse to develop and mature' (Cheng 2016: 111). Again, the debates are framed through temporal scales of inevitability, urgency and temporariness versus permanence, long-term planning or longitudinal research. Which leaves us with several questions: Whose political aims are achieved by fast or slow, long- or short-term, one-off or repeat tourism practices and rhythms? And what are the ethical outcomes? How are different forms of belonging – and therefore different claims to regulatory protection or to political action – enabled by these temporal scales?

DIGITAL SCALES

In the case of network hospitality, we must also pay attention to digital scales. These are the online spaces created around digital photos of homes and calibrated calendars; augmented maps that make underutilized resources visible and accessible; online references that build users' reputation capital; and the online peer-to-peer connections that then materialize offline in hosting and guesting arrangements. And like the spatial and temporal scales I have been discussing, these digital scales also have political and ethical effects.

This is perhaps most obvious in the scalar metaphor of the platform. Nick Srnicek, author of the book *Platform Capitalism* (2016), defines platforms as things which bring together different groups of users. In other words, platforms do not fabricate a product, they merely provide a digital infrastructure where people connect. From this definition, the platform sounds like a fairly neutral scale; that is, until Srnicek begins to refer to companies like Airbnb and Uber as 'lean platforms'. Lean platforms exist to minimize assets and cut costs; as a lean platform, Airbnb outsources almost all of the labor and the asset investments that generate income for the company. Airbnb is not in the hospitality business. It does not own any lodging properties or employ any service providers or cleaners or maintenance staff. Free-lance hosts own the accommodation and are responsible for paying the mortgage, for insuring and maintaining the property, and for all of the tasks of cleaning up after and caring for guests. Because hosts are not technically employed by Airbnb, but rather are merely connecting on the Airbnb platform, they are owed none of the protections afforded by employment laws: no paid time off, no health insurance or benefits, no minimum wage, no social security contributions and so on (and see O'Regan and Choe 2017). Furthermore, because Airbnb is a platform that connects people – not a company that employs hosts or sells a product – it can claim exemption from other regulations as well, namely state and city taxes, and fair and equal housing laws.

Responding to accusations of unfair tax practices, Airbnb issued a Community Compact which opens by reasserting its status as a platform – 'Airbnb is a people-to-people platform – of the people, by the people and for the people' – before vowing to 'ensure our community pays its fair share

of hotel and tourist taxes'. Note how the platform frames the tax burden as one shouldered by the 'community' (i.e. hosts), not Airbnb itself. And last year, in response to claims of racial discrimination across the network, which I mentioned earlier, Airbnb issued a Community Commitment that required hosts and guests to agree to treat one another without judgement or bias. In response to civil rights claims, Airbnb lawyers have argued that 'any penalty should be on the hosts renting out their homes, not on the company' (Mock 2017), since Airbnb cannot control how homeowners conduct their business or what they do with their personal property. These claims effectively divorce the scale of the platform from the intimate scale of the home as well as from the scale of federal and municipal jurisdictions.

The Community Commitment to anti-discrimination was a preemptive move that brings into stark relief the lengths to which Airbnb goes to use its status as a digital platform to evade legal responsibility. In the United States, and in other countries where Airbnb operates, there are actual laws on the books governing non-discriminatory accommodation, but Airbnb framed a legal responsibility instead as a community pledge. This pledge, like the amount of information Airbnb shares with local municipalities for tax purposes, is a response configured on Airbnb's terms. The pledge entails more or less voluntary measures, not legally enforced at the municipal or federal level. By appealing to the digital scale of the platform, Airbnb exempts itself from more binding regulation. While the Community Commitment explicitly states that racism does not belong in Airbnb, the company's silence on the laws governing non-discrimination leaves open the question of who belongs and who does not in this community.

The scale of the platform may provide Airbnb legal cover, but it also operates to create exchange value out of the other scales of network hospitality. In their article on the biopolitics of Airbnb, Maria Roelofsen and Claudio Minca explain how the bodies (of hosts and guests) and spaces (of homes and neighbourhoods) that populate the world of Airbnb become digitized commodities. As they put it, the intimate scales of the body and the home 'have been "incorporated" as objects of technological intervention and regulation, and opened up to commercial interest. Life and home have become part of a new "sharing" economic discursive formation' (Roelofsen and Minca 2018: 178). In order to participate in Airbnb at all requires individuals to move, the more seamlessly the better, between physical and digital scales. Hosts and guests have to make their bodies, biographies and bedrooms available to the kind of digital representation and surveillance that makes the transaction possible. This includes the digital images, online personal profiles and reputation systems that give strangers who meet online enough peace of mind to sleep in one another's homes offline (Roelofsen and Minca 2018: 175).

In fact, as Roelofsen and Minca point out, the digitization of the hospitality encounter has come to the point where hosting can now take place entirely at the scale of the digital. They give as an example 'digitized tourists staying in empty homes and dealing with the standardised instructions left by "local managers" often working for large investors who have quickly learned how to capitalize on this powerful mechanism' (Roelofsen and Minca 2018: 177). With online booking and rating tools and automated keys and surveillance systems, homeowners can host their guests without ever meeting them, giving another connotation to the notion of 'guests without hosts' (Germann Molz 2014a). As Roelofsen and Minca (2018: 177) point out, this sublimation of hosting into the digital scale, where hosts and guests never even meet face to face, belies

the communitarian rhetoric of Airbnb and its promises of living like a local. Instead, it is a striking example of how value is created in the movement from one scale – the intimate space of the body or home – to another – the digital platform. Their analysis is an important reminder that in order to understand the political and ethical implications of network hospitality, we have to consider how these spatial, social and digital scales overlap.

CONCLUSION: INTERSECTING SCALES OF NETWORK HOSPITALITY

In this article, I have offered a few ideas for deconstructing and critically assessing the way scale gets produced and politicized in the discourse of network hospitality. I have highlighted examples from academic research, news stories and Airbnb's own marketing discourse in order to show how framing reality through various scales can 'legitimize political action and facilitate certain forms of economic development, social redistribution, and governance' (McCann 2003: 174). We have seen how certain benefits *and* burdens accrue at different scales: home-owning hosts are able to make a little extra money by commercializing their domestic spaces, while neighbourhoods suffer from added pressure on local resources; or Airbnb investors profit by framing the company through the digital scale of the platform, while transferring legal and tax liabilities onto homeowners and regulatory obligations onto municipalities.

My intention with these stories of scale is not to reproduce scale as an ontological category, but rather to highlight how a scalar vocabulary shapes the way we think about and practice network hospitality and how we share the city. Homes, neighbourhoods, cities, nations and the global, as well as the temporal and digital scales of network hospitality, are not distinct or even nested containers of social action; they are interwoven and embedded in the political and personal practices of hosting, guesting and sharing. Indeed, we seem to have arrived in the 'hostessing society' where the whole world is hosting (Veijola and Jokinen 2008).

In this sense, scales are thoroughly relational and thoroughly political. Homes and neighbourhoods, where the face-to-face interactions among strangers unfold, become commodified nodes in the urgent inevitability of platform capitalism and in the neo-liberal economic policies rolled out by city and national governments. As homeowners or tourists, as neighbours and as citizens, we are encouraged to become micro-entrepreneurs of our own lives; to meet the retreat of social welfare programmes with entrepreneurial zeal; to buy into the cheerful promise that sharing our guest bedroom with a stranger will boost our city's sustainability and social cohesion and quality of life.

These scales are undeniably interwoven, but at the same time each scale reveals a different facet of the story. By interrogating the ways these scales get deployed, we see whose interests and whose vulnerabilities are at stake. We see how homeowners, the erstwhile victims of the global recession, can become entrepreneurial heroes; how neighbourhoods are commodified or suffer the externalities of overtourism or become sites of resistance; how tourists consume the deliciousness of temporary belonging without the obligations of long-term commitment; how cities willingly or reluctantly lay claim to regulatory power; and how platforms tilt the power and profit towards a tech elite by outsourcing the burdens of capitalism to a precarious middle class.

Once we see how different stakes and different stakeholders emerge at these different scales, we can appreciate how policies that benefit some

stakeholders at one scale may harm others at another scale. Airbnb is rather savvy about deploying a range of spatial, temporal and digital scales to advance its corporate interests; it is our obligation as scholars to be equally attuned to discourses of scale. Research on network hospitality, and Airbnb in particular, has only begun to scratch the surface of these 'new geographies of hospitality' (Roelofsen and Minca 2018: 170). As scholarship on the socialities and spatialities of these new geographies moves forward, the concept of scale opens up several promising lines of enquiry.

For one thing, using scale as a lens can shed light on the process of value creation in the collaborative economies of network hospitality and tourism more broadly. Network hospitality lends itself to practices of 'prosumption' (Ritzer and Jurgenson 2010) in which hosts and guests co-create, as both producers and consumers, the value of the hospitality encounter. It is worth examining how this co-creation occurs across various scales, from the body to the home to the city, for example, and how value creation is facilitated by the digital platform (see Roelofsen and Minca 2018). We might usefully ask how value is produced, consumed, shared or hoarded, and how scale is deployed to justify the (often uneven) circulation of this value. In this sense, paying attention to scalar discourse also reveals the nuanced workings of neo-liberal and biopolitical governance in the way people move across scales to bring the most personal parts of their lives in line with a market logic.

Another important avenue of research will focus on the use of scale in legal discourse emerging around platform companies like Airbnb. In many municipalities, legislative bodies are only now starting to catch up to the legal challenges posed by Airbnb and similar network hospitality platforms. I have given examples of how Airbnb has deflected legal responsibility by appealing to the digital scale of the platform, but as the impacts of overtourism and burdens on municipalities increase, so too will the legal debates over the role of platforms in civil society. Scholars will need to pay attention to the way scale is deployed in this legal discourse and how, or whether, companies like Airbnb are held accountable.

Third, research on non-profit, cooperative and alternative platforms is needed to highlight best practice for communities. As Dianne Dredge (2017) points out, it is precisely the liquid and multi-lateral character of network hospitality that makes it so difficult to establish a universal code of moral responsibility for the collaborative economy. Difficult, but not impossible. Already people concerned with Airbnb's social and economic impacts are proposing alternative models of collective platforms. In Amsterdam, for example, a group has launched Fairbnb, a network hospitality site that aims to 'really comply with the principles of a fair, non-extractive and collaborative economy' (Zee 2016; and see Scholz and Schneider 2016). Fairbnb seems to be in the 'good idea' phase right now, but I think we should watch this space. And as we work towards practicing network hospitality in more ethical and responsible ways, we should pay attention to the stories scale can reveal.

Finally, research that examines the scalar discourse of network hospitality calls for collaborative research methods and unconventional modes of representing scholarly knowledge. Working with artists, activists, urban planners and other stakeholders, academics can fruitfully explore the way different stories are told through scale. This research, and these stories, need not be confined to the pages of scholarly journals, but can take the form of art installations, policy interventions or visual and interactive mapping that

reveals how these scales intersect and with what moral, political, ethical, social and legal effects.

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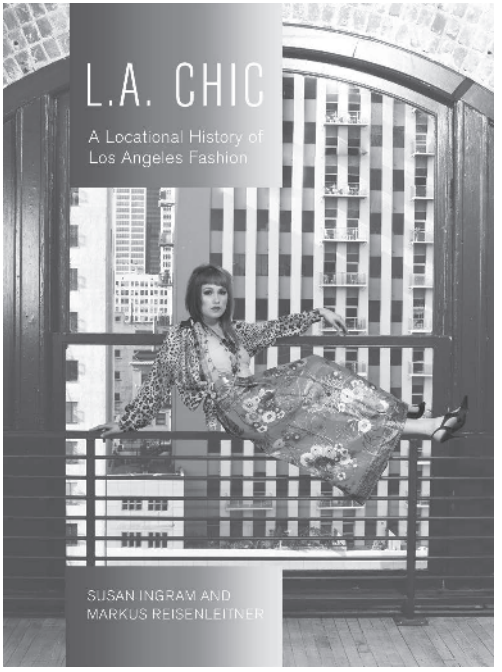
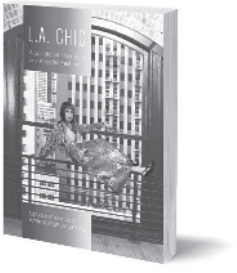


L.A. Chic

A Locational History of Los Angeles Fashion

By Susan Ingram and Markus Reisenleitner



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